

Characters

- KEITH, a man both sure of himself and full of doubt, 30s.
- SUSAN, a woman wary of and careless with her emotions, 30s.
- PELLEAS, a man on endless holiday, resigned to life, 40s.
- GENNA, Pelleas' daughter, a girl in a hurry to get on with her life, twelve years old
- NICO, Keith's step-brother, playful and proud, 40s.
- CHLOE, Nico's girl-friend, a torch singer, a woman cognizant of the vagaries of time, 30s.

The Setting:

A small beach town on a peninsula, ancient and anonymous.

Notes:

This play may be performed with an interval after Act One.

Melody to the original song "Dress up For Carnival" may be obtained by contacting the author.

Script History:

This play was read at the Hourglass Group retreat at Choate Rosemary Hall in July 2001. It received a public rehearsed reading at New Dramatists in New York on September 19, 2001 under Anne Kauffman's direction. This play was a finalist for the 2000 New Harmony Project

Act 1, Scene 1

ACT ONE Scene one

[Sound: beep-beep, beep-beep. Beep-beep. A screen appears floating in a small rectangle of space. Text materializes:]

Tll yr thghts.

How?

N Vwls.

What?

NO VOWELS.

What?

N RM.

...

Tll. Tll. TELL ME.

Truant.

Mmm.

[Voices become attached to the text. They are heard in intimacy over speakers. Text continues to materialize on the screen, as they speak.]

SUSAN

(VO)

I like vowels.

KEITH

(VO)

So do I.

SUSAN

(VO)

U tart.

KEITH

(VO)

How do u knw I'm a tart?

SUSAN

(VO)

Snse.

KEITH

(VO)

Wht?

SUSAN

(VO)

I can sense it. From here. You give yourself away.

KEITH

(VO)

How?.

SUSAN

(VO)

By your voice.

KEITH

(VO)

Shh. . . .

SUSAN

(VO)

I can hear you. From here.

KEITH

(VO)

Stop.

SUSAN

(VO)

Tell me your thoughts. . . . Tell me, Keith.

[His voice is silent. It is no longer attached to the text. Hers can still be heard, as text continues.]

KEITH

(text only)

Stop.

SUSAN

(VO)

Why?

KEITH

(text only)

N rm.

SUSAN

(VO)

Text-room?

KEITH

(text only)

N rm. N more.

SUSAN

(VO)

. . . I miss you.

[Pause. His voice is heard with text:]

KEITH

(VO)

Let's go on holiday.

[Screen fades. The outlines of the rectangle remain in light for a moment, then dark.]

Act 1, Scene 2

Scene two

[By the sea. Old arcades stand on a wooden pier under the pale neon glare of ancient hotels. The rides in the amusement park are closed. It is day, and there is no one in sight. Sun casts its rays on a terrace overlooking the sea. KEITH is standing, mobile phone in his hand. PELLEAS is standing to one side.]

PELLEAS

It is, of course, a dream.

KEITH

What?

PELLEAS

Being here. The sun magnetizes everything.

KEITH

It's all right.

PELLEAS

You can't trust it.

KEITH

I'm being a truant.

PELLEAS

On holiday?

KEITH

Will be.

PELLEAS

Not "on" now?

KEITH

I'm waiting.

PELLEAS

For your lover?

KEITH

How'd you. . .?

PELLEAS

You look away.

KEITH

What'd you mean?

PELLEAS

Toward the round-about. As if you were looking for someone, waiting for them to arrive, hoping. . .

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PELLEAS

Toward the round-about. As if you were looking for someone, waiting for them to arrive, hoping . . .

KEITH

I should go.

PELLEAS

It's nothing to be ashamed of. We all wait.

KEITH

I don't know what I'm. . .

PELLEAS

Pelleas.

KEITH

What?

PELLEAS

That's my name. Pelleas.

KEITH

Like the. . .?

PELLEAS

Opera. Yes.

KEITH

I thought there was a myth. . .

PELLEAS

I only know the opera. Debussy.

KEITH

I wouldn't know. . .

PELLEAS

Opera's an ancient form. It appeals to those who wish to live in the past, barely touching the future. Not much use in this world of beep-beep, beep-beep, eh?

KEITH

Sorry.

PELLEAS

You're attached to your phone.

KEITH

Habit.

PELLEAS

Brain cancer. It's what you will get if you keep using it.

KEITH

That's a myth.

PELLEAS

You're right not to want it. Nobody wants brain cancer. But if it comes upon you, what are you to do?

KEITH

Je suis trop malade.

PELLEAS

Is that what you will say?

KEITH

I'll have to say something. Do you need to use it?

PELLEAS

Hmm?

KEITH

The phone?

PELLEAS

I'll use the public.

KEITH

It's digital. The reception's great. Even here. I can afford the charges.

PELLEAS

I'll use the pay phone. . . later.

[KEITH slips his phone into his pocket. Pause.]

Is she late?

KEITH

I'm early.

PELLEAS

But you expect her?

KEITH

Soon.

PELLEAS

Pelleas was killed by his brother. They both loved the same woman: Melisande.

KEITH

Really?

PELLEAS

It's the story of the opera.

KEITH

Doomed love.

PELLEAS

You believe in it, then? That love can be doomed?

KEITH

I've a step-brother.

PELLEAS

It's shit.

KEITH

What?

PELLEAS

The idea of dying for romance.

KEITH

Romance is a myth.

PELLEAS

Yet, you wait.

KEITH

I wanted to go on holiday. She appeared.

PELLEAS

I've been on holiday for weeks. No one's appeared.

[Pause.]

KEITH

The sun does magnetize everything.

PELLEAS

The billboard reads "sort of famous forevermore." This is the kind of place this is.

KEITH

Means nothing to me.

PELLEAS

Touch of fame doesn't strike you?

KEITH

I was born into violence. War on TV, people on the street screaming. . .Everything exploding everywhere. Vaguely felt memories of violence, and having to grow up just the same, knowing I was born into a world gone very wrong, and what could I do about it? Was there anything I could do? Or was the world already beyond any sort of repair? That's what I think about. That's what I live with as I stand here Looking out onto the sea and the sparkling sun With humidity already sticking to my skin, and insect bites forming themselves on my wrists. Is there anything I can do? Any sort of happiness I could strive for that wouldn't seem purely selfish? Is the pursuit of love the most selfish act of all? Is it even worth pursuing when you know the world itself is falling apart? This is what I think. As the minutiae of days consumes me. And vowels disappear in space. Because even in space, there's no room. You've got a limit. One hundred and sixty characters. If you go over, the message won't go through. You can't communicate. And that's what we want, isn't it? To communicate all the time. So you eliminate the vowels. Leave the consonants. Make up your own language, your own codes. "Tell me your thoughts," your mind says. And the words bleed into your message on the screen. And you think should I simply stop thinking altogether? Wouldn't that be best? Because reality's going to be a let-down anyway. It always is. I know. I've read Lao-Tzu.

PELLEAS

"Happiness depends on disaster?"

KEITH

Exactly. And I wander the world without a clue as to having figured it out, but I'm awfully willing, And that's something isn't it? To be willing to figure things out, to figure out the world.

PELLEAS

It's always the same on holiday. Men want to justify themselves. For their lover.

KEITH

Piss off.

PELLEAS

Danke schon.

KEITH

Goddamn tourists are always German.

PELLEAS

I'm Swiss.

KEITH

Goddamn neutralist. What are you doing here? You're meeting up with someone?

PELLEAS

. . . Don't wait too long, Keith. She might not wish to find you.

KEITH

You've seen her? You've seen someone looking for me?

PELLEAS

There are worse things than being in love.

KEITH

You're a pisser.

PELLEAS

And you're a tart.

KEITH

How do you know that word?

PELLEAS

It's in the dictionary.

KEITH

How do you know to use that word with me? You've been fucking spying on my screen. Haven't you?

PELLEAS

We're fellow travelers, Keith. We're passing through. Remember your heart. Be kind. It's all we can be to each other.

KEITH

Fucking opera line. . .

[PELLEAS exits. Sound of Keith's phone: beep-beep, beep-beep. Lights fade.]

Act 1, Scene 3

Scene three

[Dark. A rectangle is lit in space. Text materializes on the screen, accompanied by voice.]

KEITH

(VO)

Susan? R U there?

[Silence.]

Susan?

[SUSAN appears. She is seated in a chair, which floats in space. She cradles a mobile phone.]

SUSAN

Men in football jerseys and plastic fake breasts search for the nearest bar. They have cans of Tetley's in their hands and want to watch the sun set. "Take your condoms with you," reads one message. "Take the cheapest flight on the latest budget airline," reads another. Instant messages race on my screen. A bit of a swim, a roll on the beach, and a paperback thriller is what is promised. While a bloom of red algae the size of a small island blows off the coast Threatening all that comes in contact with it to go toxic. Would you like to go toxic? In this space we call "perfect," everything comes undone. Time bends. Words loop and spin. People spy on each other through two-way mirrors in bathrooms Because even in private, everyone needs to see.

[Text on screen with voice:]

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(VO)

Susan? Can you read me?

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[Text on screen with voice:]

KEITH

(VO)

Susan? Can you read me?

SUSAN

I strip down to nothing but black electric tape on my breasts. Because that is what you want, isn't it? You want me to be absolutely vulnerable. You want to have something to talk about. Don't you? Don't you want to read me?

[Text materializes on screen accompanied by voice:]

KEITH

(VO)

I need. . .

SUSAN

Or is it a good kiss and a cuddle-up that you want? I don't know. I don't know anymore, Keith. All I know is I want to be debased right now. Regardless of the cost. How much for my heart? What does it matter? When I've got your eyes looking at me?

[Text materializes on screen.]

KEITH

(VO)

Susan?

SUSAN

Attraction is a strange thing.

[A succession of electronic beeping tones. The sounds signal the arrival en masse of a series of text messages on hundreds of mobile phones.]

Act 1, Scene 4

Scene four

[Keith sits on the sand. He is deconstructing a tulip. He takes the petals off the flower, turns the petals inside

out, then reconstructs: several blossoms twisted onto one stem. A twelve-year-old girl, GENNA, watches him.]

GENNA

What are you doing?

KEITH

Waiting for my lover.

GENNA

I mean. . .

[she points to his reconstruction activity]

KEITH

Do you like it?

GENNA

You're killing it.

KEITH

I'm making a new one.

GENNA

Why?

KEITH

I'm improving on nature.

GENNA

You're weird.

KEITH

Do you like it?

GENNA

It's pretty. In a weird kind of way.

KEITH

. . . What are you doing out here all alone? Shouldn't you be with your Mom or something?

GENNA

My Mom doesn't like sand. She says "It's rude," cause it gets into everything. But she doesn't mind me playing

with it. She likes me to come down to the beach. Do you like this beach?

Act 1, Scene 4

Scene four

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I mean. . .

[she points to his reconstruction activity]

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GENNA

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KEITH

It's all right.

GENNA

It's dead. All the shops close early, and the hotels are old.

KEITH

It's on the map.

GENNA

I want to go to Ibiza. I want to go to the clubs, and wear a tiny skirt and lots of makeup. I want to get five hundred instant messages in a day, and blow everything in sight. I want to swim naked in a pool, watch fire-eaters dance And wander inside a fake rainforest where you can see a live sex show for the price of a lager.

KEITH

Aren't you a bit young?

GENNA

You see me? I'm twelve. My girlfriends go, and they're eleven.

KEITH

Nice scarf.

GENNA

Yeah? My Mom got it for me. I hated it at first. I thought it was too. . . you know. . . But I like it now. It's got elephants on it. Wanna see?

KEITH

I believe you.

GENNA

. . . Are you really waiting?

KEITH

Susan missed her train. She sent a message. Said she'd be late. I said I'd wait.

GENNA

You must like her.

KEITH

I hate my job is what it is. I had to get away. It's best to get away with someone else.

GENNA

Why's that?

KEITH

You can share things. Be illicit together.

GENNA

What's that?

KEITH

. . . Do you want it?

GENNA

What?

KEITH

The flower I've just made?

GENNA

Don't you. . . ?

KEITH

I can make another. I make them all the time.

GENNA

Is that what you do?

KEITH

No. This is just a hobby.

GENNA

You are weird.

KEITH

I'm Keith.

GENNA

[points to flower]

What do you call it?

KEITH

. . . What's your name?

GENNA

Genna.

KEITH

I call it "Genna."

[He hands GENNA the reconstructed tulip. GENNA takes it, and runs away. Lights fade.]

Act 1, Scene 5

Scene five

[Evening. PELLEAS is on the pay phone off the pier.]

PELLEAS

Wait. Wait. Melissa, don't hang up. Please. I need you. I'm lost here, you see? I'm miles from a post-box. Miles from. . . Everything is distracting. Everything's in a state of disrepair. All the windows here are pigeon-shat, and the air chimes with echoes. I drink wine that is freeze-dried, that's served to me in a dirty carafe. It tastes like vinegar. But I drink it anyway, because it reminds me. . . Yes. You remember, don't you, Melissa? Running, crying, walking — all the verbs.

[PELLEAS turns away. Lights fade.]

Act 1, Scene 5

Scene five

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Wait. Wait. Melissa, don't hang up. Please. I need you. I'm lost here, you see? I'm miles from a post-box. Miles from. . . Everything is distracting. Everything's in a state of disrepair. All the windows here are pigeon-shat, and the air chimes with echoes. I drink wine that is freeze-dried, that's served to me in a dirty carafe. It tastes like vinegar. But I drink it anyway, because it reminds me. . . Yes. You remember, don't you, Melissa? Running, crying, walking — all the verbs.

[PELLEAS turns away. Lights fade.]

Act 1, Scene 6

Scene six

[The pier. Late. Music is heard in the distance: from Debussy's Pelleas & Melisande. SUSAN appears with suitcase in hand. She looks about.]

SUSAN

Keith? Keith? Manuel!

[There is no one. Music and lights fade.]

Act 1, Scene 7

Scene seven

[Sun on the terrace. SUSAN is standing, looking out. PELLEAS watches her.]

PELLEAS

Tired of waiting?

SUSAN

No.

PELLEAS

You look it.

SUSAN

I look everything. It's how I look. I can't escape any emotion: waiting, sitting, standing still, in motion, in flight, wanting, pleasing, angry at fuck-all, desperate for a cig, for a look: stoic, rapturous, aimless, resolute, determined, feckless, bitter, sullen; expecting more, expecting nothing, seeking freedom, seeking warmth, risking sleep, begging time, in a state of fear, panic, rest, absolute peace. I look everything waiting for Keith.

PELLEAS

Is that his name?

SUSAN

When he uses it.

PELLEAS

And you're -?

SUSAN

Late. The clock ticks and I move, but never fast enough. When I got on the train I thought "Why the fuck am I doing this, you know? There's red algae blowing off the coast."

PELLEAS

Red?

SUSAN

It was on the news.

PELLEAS

We don't get the news here.

SUSAN

What's the point of an excursion? You go somewhere else, somewhere you've never been, you take photos of mountains, trees, and full moons against black clouds, and at the end of things, what? What's left you? A fading suntan, and an empty wallet.

PELLEAS

Is it worth it? Waiting, filling your moments with anticipation. Is expectation worth anything at all when you don't even know if the other person will even respond?

SUSAN

I don't think about that.

PELLEAS

Not even on the screen?

SUSAN

What do you mean?

PELLEAS

When you strip down to black electric tape on your breasts.

SUSAN

What?

PELLEAS

When you key in your feelings.

SUSAN

I don't expect anything. Maybe a bit of kindness, but that's common, isn't it? Kindness and respect are part of being a civilized person. The rest is a bonus.

PELLEAS

Then why are you here?

SUSAN

It's a holiday.

PELLEAS

Something without consequence? When I met Melissa, all I wanted were actions without consequence. I looked at everything in my life as if it were a ride, a stop on and get off. Nothing more. But Melissa wanted something. She wanted proof of love. So, I started to let feelings into my life. I began to seek consequence. Until small actions weren't enough. And that's when I began to smash things, break things up, throw things out windows. I had been anesthetized. All those years. I had cut everything off. And now all I wanted was to destroy. I destroyed Melissa.

SUSAN

I wouldn't destroy Keith.

PELLEAS

You've come here to expend your love.

SUSAN

I haven't.

PELLEAS

You've come to seek ruin.

SUSAN

I couldn't think of anything better than to leave a ruin of myself.

PELLEAS

Whose glory do you crave?

SUSAN

. . . How do you. . . How do you know that about me?

PELLEAS

What?

SUSAN

Black electric tape. . . No one but Keith knows. . .

PELLEAS

[looking out, toward ocean]

See him? He's caught in the sun's rays.

SUSAN

Keith?

PELLEAS

Take measure of yourself. Think. Is this what you want?

[After a brief moment, SUSAN waves to Keith.]

Act 1, Scene 9

Scene eight

[On the other side of the pier, NICO is standing. He has his back turned. SUSAN approaches him.]

SUSAN

All right. Enough now. Enough of everything. Let me see right through you, you tart.

[NICO turns toward SUSAN. He is eating popcorn.]

NICO

What?

SUSAN

Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were —

NICO

Keith? Is that who you're looking for?

SUSAN

How do you -?

NICO

I'm his brother. He tells me things. Nico.

SUSAN

What?

NICO

My name. Like the Chelsea girl, the Warhol diva. The girl with the dead voice.

[He sings from Velvet Underground & Nico's "All Tomorrow's Parties.]

"And what costume shall the poor girl wear To all tomorrow's parties A hand-me-down dress from who knows where To all tomorrow's parties." The late, beautiful and sad Nico. My mom wanted a girl.

SUSAN

Keith didn't mention. . .

NICO

He doesn't talk about me. I'm the step-brother. The evil one. You want some popcorn? Got it from that guy over there. Don't look.

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SUSAN

But how will I -?

NICO

He's staring at us. Okay. You can look now.

SUSAN

I don't see. . .

NICO

He's gone.

SUSAN

You are evil.

NICO

Don't you like me?

SUSAN

Have you seen Keith?

NICO

He doesn't know I'm here. He hates me.

SUSAN

I don't believe that.

NICO

Keith's full of hate. You just don't know him.

SUSAN

I know him well enough.

NICO

He kills flowers. He pulls stems and breaks petals. He's a freak.

SUSAN

Did you follow him here?

NICO

I knew he was going on holiday, but that's got nothing to do with me. Chloe's got herself a gig in this club around here.

SUSAN

Chloe?

NICO

My girlfriend. What? You thought I was queer? My mom wanted a girl, but I'm not one. Not a bit.

SUSAN

Your girlfriend's a singer?

NICO

Torch. That's her specialty. Songs about being in love, and being pissed off.

SUSAN

I know all about that. I used to sing.

NICO

Yeah?

SUSAN

In school, in the tenth grade, I would open my mouth and sound would come out, different voices inside of me. I used to pretend I was everybody: all the singers, all the famous ones. I loved being Sinatra for a moment, inside my head, thinking like him as my voice would turn a phrase. Or Billie Holiday, or Roy Orbison, or Patti Smith. I loved being everybody, because I could be more of me. It was about exposure. Like puncturing a balloon at the end of a long night.

NICO

You don't sing now?

SUSAN

I got tired of exposure.

NICO

What's a bit of exposure in this world?

SUSAN

I didn't want to pretend to be famous, because what would that get me?

NICO

"Sort of famous forevermore." That's what the billboard says. See?

SUSAN

Then this is the perfect place for me.

[Music is heard in the distance: from Debussy's Pelleas & Melisande.]

There it is again. I thought I was dreaming it last night.

NICO

It's from the band-shell. Some amateur opera company, I think. You want to go?

SUSAN

I think I'll wait. Nico, eh?

NICO

That's me.

SUSAN

I never pretended to be her.

[Music fades.]

NICO

Have some popcorn.

[She takes the box of popcorn.]

Susan, right?

SUSAN

Yes.

NICO

I thought that's what Keith said.

SUSAN

So, you have spoken to him?

NICO

On the phone. Rochester, right?

SUSAN

That's where I was born. Keith must've told you everything.

NICO

He likes talking. I catch things sometimes, parts of what he says. I don't always listen. You talk much?

SUSAN

We send messages to each other.

NICO

You don't like looking at each other?

SUSAN

It's more intimate.

NICO

Goddamn farce.

SUSAN

You don't understand.

NICO

You know what you are? Afraid. Both of you. I told Keith, I won't talk to him on the mobile. I won't send him a goddamn text message that reduces me to a handful of consonants. If he wants to talk, he has to get on the damn phone, listen to my voice. I won't own a mobile.

SUSAN

Last person on earth. . .

NICO

It's narcissistic to want to be reached all the time. Let fucking dogs lie, you know what I mean?

SUSAN

Sleeping dogs.

NICO

What?

SUSAN

The expression is "Let sleeping dogs. . ."

NICO

Screw that. I will not be available twenty-four/seven. If Keith wants to find me, he's going to have to do a bit of work. Nobody wants to work anymore. They think everything's automatic. Faster, faster, faster. . . And they're going slower than ever. Look at my shirt. It's handmade. Every stitch.

SUSAN

Vintage?

NICO

I've had it going on. . . eleven years now. Fucking thing is indestructible.

SUSAN

Wouldn't have thought it.

NICO

What?

SUSAN

To look at you. . . wouldn't have thought you were old-fashioned.

NICO

I'm not.

SUSAN

You talk it.

NICO

. . . You like the way I look?

SUSAN

You look like Keith.

NICO

. . . Are you going to finish that popcorn?

SUSAN

It's awful.

NICO

Give me. I'll toss it.

SUSAN

Into the ocean?

NICO

Let the fish eat it. You're not one of those. . . Are you a purist?

SUSAN

. . . Toss it. I'm not afraid.

[NICO tosses the box of popcorn into the ocean. Lights fade.]

Act 1, Scene 9

Scene nine

[The club during the day. CHLOE is standing on the small stage. She is singing a cappella. She is rehearsing. Her hair is electric blue. KEITH watches her from a slight distance. "Dress Up for Carnival]"

CHLOE

"I can't give you anything but sorrow. And it'll go away. Come on, dress up for carnival. We've got hell to pay. Do I got to coax you into action? A room is all we need. Come on, darling, Do Me a turn And I'll take you anywhere you please."

KEITH

Doux en biscuit.

CHLOE

Throw me another line.

KEITH

I mean it.

CHLOE

Is it dead enough: late night, smoky, half-passed out, drunk?

KEITH

I guess.

CHLOE

You don't know much?

KEITH

I was just listening. I wasn't. . . making a judgment.

CHLOE

Are you a lawyer?

KEITH

No.

CHLOE

You sound like one.

KEITH

"I recognize and accept nothingness."

Act 1, Scene 9

Scene nine

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KEITH

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CHLOE

Are you a lawyer?

KEITH

No.

CHLOE

You sound like one.

KEITH

"I recognize and accept nothingness."

CHLOE

What?

KEITH

Tzu. The philosopher.

CHLOE

You're strange.

KEITH

I'm Manuel.

CHLOE

You don't look like any Manuel I've met.

KEITH

Have you been to Spain?

CHLOE

Not yet.

KEITH

There are lots of Manuels like me in Spain. Did you dye it?

CHLOE

Being a singer is all about the hair. It's how they remember you. You think it's too retro?

KEITH

I don't make judgments.

CHLOE

You're a saint.

KEITH

I like mystery.

CHLOE

Another line. . . You know, you look a little like. . . Maybe I'm wrong.

KEITH

Try me.

CHLOE

Maybe it's one of those twin things.

KEITH

I don't believe in twins. Everybody's who they are. And nobody else.

CHLOE

Something about your face, though, . . .

KEITH

I don't look like anyone, all right? I'm Manuel.

CHLOE

From Spain?

KEITH

Yeah.

CHLOE

. . .Chloe.

KEITH

Enchante.

CHLOE

I think people should talk in the language they were born with, not something they've put on.

KEITH

I like other languages.

CHLOE

You're in the wrong place. Everyone speaks the same here. I thought this place would be a little more. . .

KEITH

Exotic? Exotic's over-rated. What about comfy, dreary, out of the way. Spartan?

CHLOE

I prefer exotic.

KEITH

Like Vegas?

CHLOE

I hate Vegas. Casinos bore me.

KEITH

You'd like the tundra: frozen, pitch-white, outside of earthbound time?

CHLOE

I'd like somewhere in-between.

KEITH

"As long as it's got good transmission."

CHLOE

What?

KEITH

It's something my step-brother used to say when we were kids: "Any place is good as long as the radio's got good transmission."

[CHLOE sings another line from previous song.]

CHLOE

[sings]

"Love is an orphan. Let me intrude."

KEITH

. . . I could listen to you all day.

CHLOE

Such a line. . .

KEITH

I mean it.

CHLOE

Look, you're sweet, but the club's closed, Manuel. If you want to hear me sing, come back later.

KEITH

I'm tired of waiting. I've waited two days already. She said she'd be here. But there's no sign. This is my holiday, goddammit. I want adrenalized, direct-to-visual cortex action-entertainment. I want things to go awry, and sounds to be transcendent. I want to be disorientated, and let thoughts fall away, and for rain to piss down indoors. I want to go straight into someone's thoughts and emotions, and be blinded by the obvious. And then I want to say all the wrong things, and have it be all right. Tell me your thoughts. Put them inside me. Let's be tarts together. Let's be reconciled with history, and escape it simultaneously. I'll be your slimy little boy, and you'll be full of yearning. And we'll go into a cave and forget about time. Let's be mortal. Let's eat food from tins, only from tins: processed things, synthetic everything. Let's forget about constancy. This summer could be about drowning. Come on, love, send me a message. Read me.

[CHLOE kisses him.]

CHLOE

She'll show up. Believe me.

[Lights fade.]

Act 1, Scene 10

Scene ten

[Text in capital letters materializes on screen. The male and female voices cannot be distinguished from each other. They are heard as one.]

KEITH/SUSAN

(VO)

TELL EVRYTHNG WNT WNT WNT WNT WNT I WANT TO KNOW ALL EVERY A, E, AND U BE BE
BE. . . A TART BE A LUSH BE NAKED FRAGILE HEARTLESS TENDER SEXLESS SPITEFUL
BENEVOLENT HURTFUL STUPID WARM. SURRENDER. . . GIVE UP ON ME.

[Breath. Dark.]

Act 1, Scene 10

Scene ten

[Text in capital letters materializes on screen. The male and female voices cannot be distinguished from each other. They are heard as one.]

KEITH/SUSAN

(VO)

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BENEVOLENT HURTFUL STUPID WARM. SURRENDER. . . GIVE UP ON ME.

[Breath. Dark.]

Act 1, Scene 11

Scene eleven

[Half-light. Behind the arcade, SUSAN and NICO are making love.]

SUSAN

Keith?

NICO

What?

SUSAN

What am I doing?

NICO

You're kissing me.

SUSAN

I've got to stop.

NICO

Why?

SUSAN

Nico. Please. . .

[Lights shift to KEITH and CHLOE behind the club. They are making love.]

KEITH

Susan?

CHLOE

What?

KEITH

What am I doing?

CHLOE

You're kissing me.

KEITH

I should stop.

CHLOE

Don't.

KEITH

This isn't right. Chole. . .

CHLOE

Manuel. Please. . .

KEITH

My head hurts. I think I've got. . .

[They are viewed now in simultaneous frames:]

SUSAN

I think I've got brain cancer.

KEITH

. . . Brain cancer.

CHLOE

Shh. You don't know what you're saying.

SUSAN

Everything's spinning.

NICO

It's the arcade, the games. . . That's what you're. . .

SUSAN

I can't think anymore.

KEITH

I can't think.

CHLOE

Your mind's racing.

KEITH

Tell me.

SUSAN

Tell me.

KEITH & SUSAN

Tell me your dreams.

CHLOE

. . . I haven't any.

NICO

You need to sleep.

SUSAN

Hold me.

KEITH

I pretend I'm dying.

SUSAN

I pretend there are no more days left.

KEITH

Mortality catches me.

CHLOE

Shh.

SUSAN

Mourn me.

NICO

What?

SUSAN

Tumble my sleep.

KEITH

Too many vowels. . . .

CHLOE

What?

SUSAN

Let's use them all up.

KEITH

Be reckless?

SUSAN

Yes. Let's. . .

KEITH

Forget the screen.

[Pulsing darkness.]

Act 1, Scene 12

Scene twelve

[Late day. GENNA is playing with the reconstructed tulip. PELLEAS is drinking.]

PELLEAS

Do you want to kill it?

GENNA

I want to put it back together.

PELLEAS

You can't. Once it's been. . .

GENNA

Let me.

PELLEAS

Sullen child. . .

GENNA

Don't call me names. I don't like it.

PELLEAS

Who gave that to you?

GENNA

A man on the beach.

PELLEAS

You shouldn't have taken it.

GENNA

It was a gift.

PELLEAS

He'll expect things now.

GENNA

He won't.

PELLEAS

You don't know men.

GENNA

I know you.

PELLEAS

I'm different.

GENNA

Why's that?

PELLEAS

I'm kind.

Act 1, Scene 12

Scene twelve

[Late day. GENNA is playing with the reconstructed tulip. PELLEAS is drinking.]

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GENNA

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PELLEAS

You can't. Once it's been. . .

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GENNA

He won't.

PELLEAS

You don't know men.

GENNA

I know you.

PELLEAS

I'm different.

GENNA

Why's that?

PELLEAS

I'm kind.

GENNA

You pretend. You tell people you're Swiss.

PELLEAS

What should I say?

GENNA

The truth. People would trust you more.

PELLEAS

I'm from the Falklands?

GENNA

Yes.

PELLEAS

No one would talk to me.

GENNA

Mom would.

PELLEAS

Give me that flower. You're hurting it.

GENNA

Flowers don't have feelings.

PELLEAS

I don't know who you're like. You're not like me.

GENNA

I'm like Mom. Isn't that what you always say? "Just like Melissa."

PELLEAS

Be quiet.

GENNA

I want to go to Ibiza. I want to get high on music and dancing, and twirl my light-stick for all to see. I want you to give me money, and stop pretending you like taking care of me. Steal something for me, grab somebody's wallet, do a father's duty, So I can go to the beach, to a real beach, and listen to the DJ spin all night, and take my body through every groove.

[He grabs the flower from her, and crushes it with his hands.]

PELLEAS

Insolent, malicious, sickening child. Get away from me.

[Pause.]

GENNA

You are going to be so sorry. You hear me?

[PELLEAS looks away. GENNA runs away. Lights fade.]

Act 1, Scene 13

Scene thirteen

[On the beach. KEITH is seated. He talks to himself in French.]

KEITH

Ecoutez. Regardez. Regardez moi. Je suis desole. Je suis perdus. Je ne me sens pas bien. Tu veux quoi encore? Qu'est que je peux te donner en plus? [Listen. Look. Look at me. I am sorry. I am lost. I do not feel well. What more do you want? What else can I give you?]

[NICO appears.]

NICO

Hey, bud.

KEITH

What are you doing here?

NICO

Holiday.

KEITH

I could kill you.

NICO

I thought you'd want to hug me. It's been a long time.

KEITH

This is my holiday.

NICO

So?

KEITH

You're going to ruin it. Like everything else.

NICO

Would you blame yourself for something for a change?

KEITH

I can't do anything without you. . .

Act 1, Scene 13

Scene thirteen

[On the beach. KEITH is seated. He talks to himself in French.]

KEITH

Ecoutez. Regardez. Regardez moi. Je suis desole. Je suis perdus. Je ne me sens pas bien. Tu veux quoi encore? Qu'est que je peux te donner en plus? [Listen. Look. Look at me. I am sorry. I am lost. I do not feel well. What more do you want? What else can I give you?]

[NICO appears.]

NICO

Hey, bud.

KEITH

What are you doing here?

NICO

Holiday.

KEITH

I could kill you.

NICO

I thought you'd want to hug me. It's been a long time.

KEITH

This is my holiday.

NICO

So?

KEITH

You're going to ruin it. Like everything else.

NICO

Would you blame yourself for something for a change?

KEITH

I can't do anything without you. . .

NICO

I'm just passing. . .

KEITH

What is it this time?

NICO

Guess.

KEITH

A girl.

NICO

Very good. And you?

KEITH

The same.

NICO

Blood's blood.

KEITH

Would you stop that?

NICO

What?

KEITH

All that brother shit.

NICO

I am your brother.

KEITH

Step.

NICO

I'm still blood. Same Mom.

KEITH

Different Dad.

NICO

How is Dad?

KEITH

He's a wreck. You know how he gets in the summer. . .

NICO

He's not good at summer, is he?

KEITH

I almost asked him on holiday.

NICO

He wouldn't have come. You know how he hates the beach.

KEITH

Yeah.

NICO

Second thoughts?

KEITH

Never.

NICO

Then what are you doing out here hanging your head?

KEITH

I'm not.

NICO

Whenever you start talking to yourself in French. . .

KEITH

I'm trying to sort things out.

NICO

Can I help?

KEITH

No.

NICO

Always the wolf.

KEITH

What?

NICO

It's how you act. Like a wolf.

KEITH

So? Wolves are cool.

NICO

When you're fifteen, twenty, when you're reading Jack London and are addicted to "big moments of living" and you think you'd "rather be ashes than dust," but not now when you're pushing. . .

KEITH

Leave me alone.

NICO

Is that why you came to this place? Cause it's out of the way, off the path?

KEITH

It was as far from the city as I could get.

[Music is heard in the distance: from Debussy's Pelleas et Melisande.]

What the hell is that?

NICO

From the band-shell. They're rehearsing.

KEITH

Opera? The last thing I need. . .

NICO

They're not bad for amateurs.

KEITH

I can't think with opera.

[Music fades.]

I'm selfish.

NICO

What?

KEITH

With love. I want it all for myself.

NICO

Is that why you're apologizing to yourself in French?

KEITH

Could you be anyone else?

NICO

What do you mean?

KEITH

Could you be anyone else?

NICO

Who do you want me to be?

KEITH

Be my lover.

NICO

I can't do that.

KEITH

Why not?

NICO

Because I'm your brother.

KEITH

But that's what I want.

NICO

A wish?

KEITH

We all get three. Don't we?

NICO

You believe in wishes?

KEITH

I believe things can come true. Be older than me.

NICO

I already am.

KEITH

Much older.

NICO

Are you afraid of time?

KEITH

I'm catching up with myself.

NICO

I feel all of seventeen sometimes.

KEITH

You haven't been seventeen in years. I remember when you were seventeen. You hated me then.

NICO

I hate you now.

KEITH

The difference being. . .?

NICO

I've a different kind of hatred now: a hatred without feeling.

KEITH

Bastard.

NICO

Would you want me to change?

KEITH

I often wish it.

NICO

But with three wishes, what are you to do?

[Pause.]

KEITH

You pretend to be interested in me. You act like you have known me forever.

NICO

I watched you being born.

KEITH

I will always be small and vulnerable in your eyes.

NICO

Small and pleading. And I have no responsibility. Your future does not depend on me.

KEITH

How easily you say things.

NICO

Everything is easy. Everything is within our reach.

KEITH

Strange burdens.

NICO

What?

KEITH

You go off, do things. I'm left with work and duty, and doubting myself. I drink beer, wine, vodka. I have sex with hundreds of women. I do everything to test my body. How much until I get drunk, really drunk, out of my head? Sometimes no matter how much I drink, I stay sober. And then some days with the same exact amount,

my head spins, And I wake up in the morning trying to shake my whole life off. And then Dad calls and I have to deal with him, don't I? Because I am his boy, his other mirror: "When are you going to find yourself, son?" There should be no rules to life. And yet I love order. I tally up the day checking off what's been accomplished, while I sneak away moments of real feeling to send messages to lovers, ex-lovers, potential lovers. . . "Tell me your thoughts. Tell me everything." And they tell, and I imagine affairs, because the ones you imagine are, in the end, the best Because they live in fantasy, in dreams, and nothing can match that.

NICO

Dreaming only lasts so long.

KEITH

Would you rather love be constant or random? In dreams, you can sustain a love so much longer. You find yourself wanting real life to compete with your dreams.

NICO

I'm glad I got Chloe. We're both crazy, but she settles me.

KEITH

Chloe?

NICO

I told you about her.

KEITH

No.

NICO

On the phone. Remember I said I'd met this girl with electric-blue hair?

KEITH

You didn't say anything.

NICO

Well, I met her, and. . .that's why I'm here. She's got a gig at the club.

[Pause.]

Look at you. You've fallen, haven't you? You're a man in love.

KEITH

I'm always in love. It's my natural state.

NICO

And you think I'm screwed up. Come on. Give a kiss.

KEITH

No.

NICO

Indulge me. I want to test you, lover boy. We're still brothers, right?

[NICO kisses KEITH on the cheek.]

Are you all right, bud?

KEITH

I'm fine.

NICO

Chloe will be starting her set soon. You want to come? She's a good singer.

KEITH

Maybe later. . .

NICO

Later then.

[NICO walks away. GENNA appears.]

GENNA

Hey, flower-guy. Take me out.

KEITH

What?

GENNA

To the band-shell. We could watch an opera together. We could get high on crystal meth while they sing an aria about love and doom. We could sit in the back and laugh at everyone, from the perfect vantage point, while we rub our legs together in the dark by the light of the moon, and smoke herbal ecstasy cigarettes. We could share a triple vodka and lime on the rocks, and eat prawn crackers from a worn bowl. We could do anything. We could be obscene. Our obscenity could be someone else's idea of purity.

KEITH

What are you talking about?

GENNA

Don't you think I'm pretty?

KEITH

You're sweet.

GENNA

I don't want to be sweet. I hate "sweet." It's boring. I want to wear a cherry-red dress against a leopard-print wall, and be alluring. I want to ravish you. I want to drown with you in a flesh pit. Don't you want to go out with me?

KEITH

To the opera?

GENNA

Anywhere. I'm ready.

KEITH

You're twelve years old.

GENNA

Asshole.

KEITH

What?

GENNA

You're like all the rest of them.

KEITH

Genna. Please.

GENNA

Why'd you give me that flower anyway? Creep.

KEITH

Genna?

GENNA

I hope I never see you again. I hope you rot on this stinking beach.

[GENNA runs away]

KEITH

Genna?

[The sky starts to dim. Keith talks to himself.]

Ecoutez. Regardez. Regardez moi.Je suis desole. Je suis perdus.[Listen. Look. Look at me]I am sorry. I am lost.]

[SUSAN appears against the dimming violet sky. She is singing The Velvet Underground & Nico's "I'll Be Your Mirror" in her version of Nico's voice.]

SUSAN

"I'll be your mirror Reflect what you are, in case you don't know. . ."

KEITH

Susan?

SUSAN

[sings]

I'll be the wind, the rain and the sunset
The light on your door to show that you're home.
KEITH

You're singing.

SUSAN

I'm not hiding anymore.

KEITH

Your voice is different.

SUSAN

I'm using someone else's.

KEITH

What?

SUSAN

Be my girlfriend.

KEITH

What are you talking about?

SUSAN

That's what I want from you. I can't think of you as a boy anymore. I don't want to. Be my girlfriend. Let's be strange. Let's start our holiday.

KEITH

What's happened to you?

[She sings chorus from "I'll Be Your Mirror.]

SUSAN

"When you think the night has seen your mind That inside you're twisted and unkind Let me stand to show that you are blind Please put down your hands 'Cause I see you."

[Blackout.]

Act 2, Scene 1

ACT TWO Scene one

[Sound: beep-beep, beep-beep. Extended beep. A rectangle is lit in space. Text materializes on screen. GENNA's voice accompanies text.]

GENNA

R U GETTING THIS? I'M NOT HERE ANYMORE. DON'T LOOK FOR ME. I'M IN IBIZA. WHERE EVRYTHNG GLEAMS. FUCK CIVILITY. FCK FCK FCK CIVILITY.

[PELLEAS is revealed in light. He stands at the edge of the ocean. He holds a mobile phone in his hands. He is reading the message GENNA has sent. He tosses the mobile phone into the ocean, and walks away.]

Act 2, Scene 2

Scene two

[Past the old arcades and the neon glare of the ancient hotels, and the rides in the amusement park, there is a road that wraps around the peninsula. KEITH and SUSAN are walking.]

KEITH

I'd like to know where the fuck we are.

SUSAN

It's best not to know. Isn't that what you've always said?

KEITH

I have never said that. My step-brother says things like that.

SUSAN

Nico. . .

KEITH

Bastard.

SUSAN

He's not that bad.

KEITH

Did he tell you anything? Did he say things about me?

SUSAN

I thought we could talk to each other, like girlfriends.

KEITH

I'm not your girlfriend.

SUSAN

What are you, then?

KEITH

Give a kiss.

SUSAN

No. Kisses should never be on the lips. My mother taught me that. It was her warning to me against the world. She was offering me a bit of armor.

KEITH

Lose it.

SUSAN

You're being silly.

KEITH

Steal something for me. When we go back, walk into a store and steal some cigarettes.

SUSAN

I'm hopeless at stealing. Not like my mother. She used to steal all the time. It was her only pleasure in life.

KEITH

Her only. . .?

SUSAN

She didn't get anything from anything else. I think I inherited that from her. Except I haven't found my pleasure yet.

KEITH

What am I, then?

SUSAN

I don't know. You want me to lie to you?

KEITH

I thought that's why we were here. To lie to each other. Why else go on holiday?

SUSAN

Doesn't lying make you feel guilty?

KEITH

You sound like my step-brother.

SUSAN

You could learn a bit from him.

KEITH

I don't want to think about my brother.

[Pause.]

Why the hell did we come here?

SUSAN

You wanted to get away, to slip away with me.

KEITH

Blasted sun. . .

SUSAN

Can't you be happy?

KEITH

I don't trust happiness.

SUSAN

You were brought up Catholic, weren't you?

KEITH

Doesn't it scare you? To be here, to be happy?

SUSAN

Nothing scares me.

KEITH

You're brave.

SUSAN

Isn't that how you'd like me to be?

KEITH

. . .A shrine. I can see it from here.

SUSAN

You want to pray?

KEITH

You light a candle in a foreign place, you make a wish, good things can come of it.

SUSAN

I didn't know you believed in such things.

KEITH

How could you know? You hide from me.

SUSAN

I'm right here, Keith.

KEITH

On tinder-sticks I am. I'm nothing but a bare emotional thing. And you say to yourself "He'll be fine. He's Keith. He's always fine."

SUSAN

Tenterhooks.

KEITH

What?

SUSAN

You mean tenterhooks. You said "tinder-sticks."

KEITH

Words are strange creatures. They betray me.

SUSAN

I like tinder-sticks.

KEITH

I can never say what I mean. Fucking holiday. Goddamn sun. I've damn gone all of seventeen again. . .

SUSAN

Shh. Let's go to the shrine. We'll pray together.

[Lights fade.]

Act 2, Scene 3

Scene three

[Sun on the terrace. PELLEAS is smoking, and drinking. KEITH is standing.]

KEITH

I thought we were lost. There were empty beer bottles, plastic beads, stones of colored glass. You could barely see anything. But you could feel everyone who had prayed there, everyone who had genuflected before the image of the saint whose eyes were cut out. Susan pulled at me. She wanted to take a photo of the shrine. I told her it was wrong. *Vous avez tort.*

PELLEAS

Sacrilege?

KEITH

There are places in this world that you can't steal. You can't put them in a camera, and take them home. Some things must remain sacred for the good of us all.

PELLEAS

Ghosts in the mirror.

KEITH

What?

PELLEAS

That's what I see sometimes: half of a face, a little girl's shoulder in the mirror. When I turn, the ghost is gone. Now, would I were to question it. . . it would stop being sacred. My experience of the ghost would lose its hallowedness.

KEITH

Susan couldn't understand. I think I'm losing her.

PELLEAS

You love too much.

Act 2, Scene 3

Scene three

[Sun on the terrace. PELLEAS is smoking, and drinking. KEITH is standing.]

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PELLEAS

You love too much.

KEITH

I'm too faithful for my own good.

PELLEAS

Are you?

KEITH

That's why I always get hurt in the end. My faithfulness does me in. But as we were leaving the shrine, Susan

did the strangest thing. She stood very still and bowed her head, And she wouldn't say anything. And then out of this peculiar silence, she kissed me. On my head. As if I were a boy. And then she ran down the hill, and wouldn't look at me.

PELLEAS

She's a spiteful, possessive child.

KEITH

Sorry?

PELLEAS

Genna. You shouldn't have given her that flower.

KEITH

How do you-?

PELLEAS

She's my daughter. She has to tell me everything. She doesn't have a lover's luxury.

KEITH

What do you mean?

PELLEAS

Secrets.

KEITH

It was an innocent flower. Hardly something to keep secret.

PELLEAS

She didn't understand that. Now she's gone. . . She's left everything. She sends messages: "Fuck civility." I stand by the pay phone and wait for her to ring. I've become like a lover. Hanging on everything. I'm consumed by my own thoughts. Angry at myself, at her. At Melissa, her mother, because she's just like her, just like Genna, always looking for proof of love. I wait. I drink. I smoke.

KEITH

You've had five drinks in a row.

PELLEAS

I crave things. I satisfy my thirst.

KEITH

Don't you work?

PELLEAS

I live on holiday.

KEITH

Perpetual pleasure?

PELLEAS

I keep what people give me.

KEITH

You mooch?

PELLEAS

Good word.

KEITH

I hate moochers.

PELLEAS

You hate everything, Keith.

KEITH

I think I will change my name.

PELLEAS

Nur diesen tag.

KEITH

Damn Germans.

PELLEAS

I'm Swiss.

KEITH

You should look for your daughter.

PELLEAS

She'll show up. . .in time.

KEITH

Lousy excuse for a father. . .

PELLEAS

I thought you believed in Tzu. "Passivity is the greatest action."

KEITH

Not when it comes to responsibility I don't.

PELLEAS

Then you're a weekend philosopher.

KEITH

Being here, away from everything, from my job, the misery of days, makes me question everything. Does it take more courage to love or be loved? Why did Susan kiss me on the head as if I were a boy? "Fuck civility." Isn't that what Genna says to you in her messages? "Fuck loyalty," I say. It doesn't work. Even when you try to do the right thing, even when you pray, light a candle, the world shatters anyway. Damn sun in my eyes. . . Susan's tired of me.

PELLEAS

You're hard work.

KEITH

So is everybody. A little patience, wouldn't you say?

PELLEAS

Take her to the opera. It will tell you something about her. Opera's a good test of love.

KEITH

I'm afraid.

PELLEAS

I'm always trembling. It's not such a bad way to live. Here. I'll give you my tickets. I was going to take Genna, but. . . It'll do me good to know some use is being made of them.

KEITH

Acts of kindness. What do I do with them?

PELLEAS

Take them in your hands. Hold them in your heart.

[PELLEAS offers KEITH his opera tickets. KEITH takes them. Lights fade.]

Act 2, Scene 4

Scene four

[Behind the arcade. GENNA has a mobile phone in hand. NICO approaches her.]

NICO

Can I try it?

GENNA

The mobile doesn't work. It's got water in it. See?

NICO

So, what are you -?

GENNA

Shh.

NICO

Are you -?

GENNA

Shh.

NICO

. . . You're hiding?

GENNA

Get away.

NICO

I'm Nico.

GENNA

I'm listening.

NICO

What?

GENNA

There's a song playing. . . Far away. Hear it?

NICO

Someone's got a radio on. Up in the hills.

GENNA

Been playing for hours. I can't make it out.

[After a slight moment, NICO sings from Bowie & Queen's "Under Pressure.]

NICO

[sings]

"Cause love's such an old-fashioned word
And love dares you to care for
The people on the edge of the night
And love dares you. . ."

Act 2, Scene 4

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[Behind the arcade. GENNA has a mobile phone in hand. NICO approaches her.]

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NICO

[sings]

"Cause love's such an old-fashioned word
And love dares you to care for
The people on the edge of the night
And love dares you. . ."

GENNA

You know it?

NICO

It's Bowie and Queen. My step-brother and I used to sing to it; we'd take turns being David and Freddie.

GENNA

Freddie?

NICO

Freddie Mercury. He was a singer.

GENNA

Like Bjork?

NICO

He had a big voice.

GENNA

I like big voices. I can't stand whisperers.

NICO

I know what you mean.

GENNA

They're just pretending to be singers. What'd you say your name was?

NICO

Nico.

GENNA

Is that with a "k?"

NICO

With a "c."

GENNA

Weird.

NICO

Yeah. I guess it is.

GENNA

So, why'd you take turns being people you weren't, Nico?

NICO

We could put on different guises. Pretend we were on stage in front of a huge crowd. Or just wail, cause we wanted to. Don't you do that?

GENNA

I don't have a brother.

NICO

Sister?

GENNA

It's just me.

NICO

You're an only. . .?

GENNA

It stinks.

NICO

You get everything. All the love and affection at once.

GENNA

And all the hate, too.

NICO

Sometimes I wish I was an only.

GENNA

Yeah?

NICO

I was for a while. When I was with my Mom. And then she got married again, and had my brother. That's a nice scarf.

GENNA

You like it? It's not too. . .?

NICO

No. It's cool. Got elephants on it, right?

GENNA

How'd you know?

NICO

I can see them in the design. I like elephants. They're noble.

GENNA

. . . I can't get this song out of my head.

NICO

Is that why you're hiding? To listen to music?

GENNA

No.

NICO

What then?

GENNA

. . . Are you creepy?

NICO

Do I look it?

GENNA

You look a bit like. . .

NICO

Keith?

GENNA

You know him?

NICO

He's my step-brother.

GENNA

He's a bastard. He wouldn't take me out, even after he had given me a flower.

NICO

He's afraid all the time. You shouldn't take it personal.

GENNA

Would you take me out?

NICO

I thought you were hiding.

GENNA

I am. I've run away.

NICO

Your Mom know?

GENNA

My Mom's not here. Just Dad.

NICO

Does he know?

GENNA

He let me.

NICO

Some Dad. . .

GENNA

I hitched a ride. Didn't get very far. Couple were going home for the night. They couldn't see themselves driving me to Ibiza.

NICO

Ibiza? You'd have to go to the fucking airport.

GENNA

You talk like that with everybody?

NICO

What?

GENNA

"Fuck."

NICO

Sorry.

GENNA

I'm twelve years old, you know.

NICO

I didn't think.

GENNA

Do I look it?

NICO

Twelve? Maybe.

GENNA

You'd still take me out?

NICO

Where do you want to go?

GENNA

I want to go dancing. There's this club called Hell. It's all red inside.

NICO

You want to be my mercury girl. Is that what you want?

GENNA

What's that?

NICO

My swift lover.

GENNA

I just want to dance.

NICO

I can't. Wouldn't be right.

GENNA

Fucking principles. . .

NICO

I've already got a girl.

GENNA

Is she pretty?

NICO

Yeah. She sings at the club.

GENNA

At Hell?

NICO

No. It's a jazz club.

GENNA

I've no luck.

NICO

You don't need luck to dance. You want to dance? You could dance right here.

GENNA

What'd you mean?

NICO

Give me your hand.

GENNA

I'll step on your toes.

NICO

Take my lead.

GENNA

. . . Can I pretend?

NICO

What?

GENNA

To be your mercury girl?

NICO

You can be anything you like.

[They dance. Bowie & Queen's "Under Pressure" fades up.]

Act 2, Scene 5

Scene five

[The stands. An opera is being performed in the band-shell: Debussy's Pelleas et Melisande. Music is heard very softly underneath the following. SUSAN and KEITH are seated in the stands. He watches her. Her face is transfixed by light.]

SUSAN

I can see your soul as if it were clear glass before me. Nothing escapes my gaze, and yet everything escapes me: Your touch, your smell. . . What is the value of love? Is it worth anything? The lines move in the horizon as the sun sets and you build a wall around me with your eyes. I want to reach your inner ear. I want to play music into it as you drink clear liquor Distilled by a woman's strong hands, and you fall into a trance. . . The useless maneuvers of wanton boys and careless girls inspire me. Do you see? I inch toward the fading screen

in my mind. I write your name "Keith," letting the "k" suspend in space as the thought of you Bleeds in shades of lunar dreams that coat the night, and transform your eyes into light that turns upward as I reach for it, and watch it escape my hands.

[*KEITH turns away from her. Opera continues. Lights fade.*]

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[*KEITH turns away from her. Opera continues. Lights fade.*]

Act 2, Scene 6

Scene six

[*CHLOE is standing on the pier. Keith appears.*]

KEITH

I could feel her eyes on me. I thought "There's no chance of recovery here. Find Chloe."

CHLOE

I'm not yours.

KEITH

I'm addicted to what's beyond my reach.

CHLOE

Think of me as being dead.

KEITH

Death sustains me. Elegies keep me alive. I don't know what I'd do if I didn't mourn things.

CHLOE

Well, you shouldn't mourn yourself. It's wrong.

KEITH

I lie awake and feel my fragility the bones under my skin, teeth cracking. . .

CHLOE

You're not seventeen.

KEITH

What?

CHLOE

That's the kind of thoughts people have when they're seventeen.

KEITH

I didn't say I was a wolf.

CHLOE

What?

KEITH

When you're seventeen, you think that's what you want to be. But I didn't say that. I said I feel my fragility as a human being. I think of time spent, lost, rolling away, of doing, of constantly doing, and not knowing why. Dreams. Do you see?

CHLOE

Those aren't dreams.

KEITH

Well, then I don't have any. Give a kiss. Come on.

CHLOE

What would Nico say?

KEITH

Who's that?

CHLOE

I may look like one, but I'm not a tart.

KEITH

I never said. . .

CHLOE

You come here and wrap your arms around me. You expect things. I love Nico. You understand? He's good to me.

KEITH

He's good value. How much does he make in a week?

CHLOE

Don't talk like that.

KEITH

What do you want me to say? I gave you my heart. Even if it was a moment's indiscretion. I gave it to you. Completely.

CHLOE

There are a hundred and twenty verses devoted to a moment's indiscretion. I could sing them to you, if you like. I'll picture all the heartbreak and the pain.

KEITH

Don't you feel anything?

CHLOE

You are sweet.

KEITH

. . . Did you know who I was when -?

CHLOE

Not at first. Nico doesn't talk about you much.

KEITH

He's a step.

CHLOE

Exactly.

KEITH

We were close once. We'd catch a midnight movie and just drive, get a feel for the country, talk about anything. Nico would come up with these stories: Crazy tales about fucked-up hats and weird omens. We'd talk all night, not even knowing where we going. We would communicate directly on a pure plane. Do you think madness is contagious?

CHLOE

I think we're all mad. Especially in the summer.

KEITH

Euphoria?

CHLOE

Hysteria. Summer brings out the hysteria in everyone. Everyone wants to repair their lives or recover them or start new ones. Even in a town like this where there is just one slot machine, and a round of games at the arcade. People make themselves stare in the mirror, and you know if you stare long enough, It's only a matter of time before you start to feel ugly.

KEITH

I think I've inherited Nico's madness.

CHLOE

You're nothing alike.

KEITH

I left Susan at the opera. I thought she didn't want me. And now I'm. . . broken.

CHLOE

There's another word for "broken."

KEITH

What's that?

CHLOE

"Mortal."

[Lights fade.]

Act 2, Scene 7

Scene seven

[PELLEAS is on the pay phone off the pier. He is smoking.]

PELLEAS

I'm human, Melissa. Why would I lie? Because it's my nature? Not even on the phone will you give me. . . Don't you remember anything? We would always stay up a little later, enjoy things a little longer. Genna's got that in her blood. I can't change that. What was it you said? "I'm all the wrong things: burlesque, coquettish, bourgeois. And I want constancy." You think I'd forgotten? I know all about *sehnsucht*: yearning. It was my downfall, wasn't it? No. No messages. Not all day. Not even in the sky. Of course I have my mobile.

[The sound of a balloon being punctured.]

It's nothing. A... balloon.

[The sound of a balloon being punctured.]

It's nothing. Melissa, you don't have to... Of course I want to see you. I always want to see you. You're my lifeline. I promise. Genna will be all right.

[In the background, GENNA is seen standing on the roof of the arcade. She holds a bunch of balloons in her hand, which she pops one by one. Lights fade.]

Act 2, Scene 7

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It's nothing. Melissa, you don't have to... Of course I want to see you. I always want to see you. You're my lifeline. I promise. Genna will be all right.

[In the background, GENNA is seen standing on the roof of the arcade. She holds a bunch of balloons in her hand, which she pops one by one. Lights fade.]

Act 2, Scene 8

Scene eight

[SUSAN and NICO are on the beach.]

NICO

He's a fucking bastard.

SUSAN

He meant nothing by it.

NICO

He left you, didn't he? At the opera? That's like...the worst thing.

SUSAN

Maybe he's tired of me.

NICO

He doesn't even know you.

SUSAN

We stopped at this shrine on the road. It was so hot I don't think my brain was functioning. Keith was praying. He looked like someone else. I thought "I've never seen him like this. I want to take a picture. I want to remember his face." The flash got the better of me. He walked out of the shrine kicking at the rocks on the ground, not wanting to talk to me. How does one live a life in the presence of great damage?

NICO

You're asking me?

SUSAN

I don't think my life is reparable. It's moved past me somehow, and I'm just catching up with myself.

NICO

Stop thinking about him.

SUSAN

The shrine was beautiful. That's the wonder of it all. The image of a saint with his eyes carved out, and an open palm. I felt a kind of peace there. Taking out the camera was a reflex at best, a reflex obtained from the real world. Not a true thing, not something I would've done naturally. In fact, I wouldn't have come here if it hadn't been for Keith.

NICO

You don't like holidays?

SUSAN

His messages would float on the screen and I would catch them: the muscle of a "k," the vein of an "e." Letters took on shape, meaning. I started to float with the screen, letting space consume me. He said the word "holiday." Everything came into focus. I can't even remember the screen now. Who needs to send a message? Words can wait. Time is endless. I can't think of anything but my own pleasure. Is that selfish?

NICO

I have selfishness bred in me. But I think I know what you mean. About bodies. I always think about them. Gets me into all sorts of shit I'd rather not deal with. It's a curse, I think. Because you spend all your time thinking about what they can do to you: if that leg came up to me here . . . if that thigh rested on my ass. . . Possibilities can get you lost.

SUSAN

I just think if I hadn't taken out my damn camera. . .

NICO

He'll have forgotten by now.

SUSAN

Why'd he give me the opera tickets if he was so upset with me? It makes me feel like I'm using him.

NICO

I don't know anyone who's truly altruistic. Everything is about: I want her to fondle me so I will smile every time I see her even if I don't want to; I want a job so I will act like you're my friend; I want a pure sign of goodness so I will act like a creep and thus make the other person feel as if they are doing an act of God. It's all a game.

SUSAN

You're a bit evil.

NICO

I'm a wonder.

SUSAN

That, too.

[He kisses her.]

Being near the ocean always makes me cry.

NICO

We could sit up by those rocks. . .

SUSAN

No. I want to be near the algae. It's starting to wrap itself around the peninsula.

NICO

That red stuff?

SUSAN

Everything will be toxic soon. What is it about loving someone that makes you want to see that person all the time?

NICO

The pleasure of their company.

SUSAN

The pleasure of their presence. Even if you have nothing to say to each other.

NICO

I thought you'd given up on Keith.

SUSAN

That doesn't mean I can't think about him.

NICO

You're in for a fall.

SUSAN

Maybe that's what I need right now. To fall hard.

NICO

Splinters on your back?

SUSAN

Yes.

[Lights fade.]

Act 2, Scene 9

Scene nine

[Screen and sky: text materializes. Silent at first, then accompanied by GENNA's voice.]

0500

THIS IS THE 0500 HOUR

GENNA

DO YOU READ ME? DO YOU READ, READ, READ ME?

[PELLEAS appears on the beach.]

PELLEAS

Genna?

GENNA

I am in space. I am dancing. Tossed on a sky-blue screen, On a trampoline, there is nothing I won't do inside this weightless maneuver, I am beyond gravity. Feel me.

PELLEAS

Genna?

GENNA

Hip, twirl, and a lousy rattle. I am thinking nasty, big-girl thoughts now. I am beyond ten or even eleven. I've grown up and you haven't noticed. But I'm okay, Dad. Cause I'm flying.

PELLEAS

Where are you?

GENNA

Floating. There's red algae. See?

PELLEAS

Come back here.

GENNA

Look at me, Dad. You're not looking.

PELLEAS

Where? Where are you?

GENNA

The sun is within my reach.

Act 2, Scene 9

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[Screen and sky: text materializes. Silent at first, then accompanied by GENNA's voice.]

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GENNA

Floating. There's red algae. See?

PELLEAS

Come back here.

GENNA

Look at me, Dad. You're not looking.

PELLEAS

Where? Where are you?

GENNA

The sun is within my reach.

PELLEAS

It's dark. I can't see anything.

GENNA

I am floating on the ocean, skipping stones: nob-gob and fripper frapper.

PELLEAS

What are you saying?

GENNA

Hold me.

PELLEAS

Stop playing games with me. Now, come back down from wherever you are, and we'll. . .

GENNA

I'm fine, Dad. There's a red bloom wrapping itself around me.

[PELLEAS sees Genna's scarf on the sand, he picks it up.]

PELLEAS

Genna?

GENNA

I'm dancing.

[Text disappears from sky and screen.]

PELLEAS

Genna!

[PELLEAS runs away, scarf in hand. Music fades up from the band-shell. KEITH enters. He is drunk.]

KEITH

Goddamn opera.

[NICO appears.]

NICO

You shouldn't be out here. There's some kind of storm.

KEITH

Go on back to Chloe. She's mad in love with you.

NICO

Chloe?

KEITH

Your girl. Your electric blue angel with the catch of heartbreak in her voice.

NICO

I thought you meant Susan. She's great, isn't she? She's so confused about everything. Her mouth opens and words just tumble out.

KEITH

Stay away from her. She doesn't need your madness. She's got enough with mine.

NICO

She's not yours. She can do whatever she likes.

KEITH

Don't lead her on. Could you do that for me? For your step. . .?

NICO

Sure, bud.

KEITH

I hate when you call me that.

NICO

It's affection.

KEITH

I used to look up to you when I was little.

NICO

Have I let you down?

KEITH

I don't know what I want from anyone. I've spent my whole life trying to be you, and not be you, Trying to please fucking everyone, and getting through everything alone. I can't remember what it's like to really do what I want, cause every time I try, I feel you looking at me.

NICO

I never see you.

KEITH

You look at me all the time.

NICO

You're not yourself.

KEITH

I'm more myself than I have ever been.

NICO

Look at the state of you. I'll have to fetch you coffee in the morning. Like when you were a teenager.

KEITH

You were never around then.

NICO

You don't remember.

KEITH

Why does Chloe love you so much?

NICO

I don't like you talking about Chloe.

KEITH

I screwed her. I can talk about anything.

NICO

Stop it.

KEITH

You're my brother, right? What's yours is mine, what's mine is . . .

NICO

What name did you go by? With Chloe? You still do that, don't you? Call yourself different names?

KEITH

Manuel.

NICO

That's what Dad called you.

KEITH

He did not.

NICO

He used to tease you with it. He'd call out "Manuel, where are you?"

KEITH

He never did that.

NICO

He wanted to mess you up.

KEITH

Dad wouldn't even speak to me. He was looking for you all the time. You were always running about. I'd sit up and wait for you. Did you fuck Susan? Did you?

NICO

. . . It's over.

KEITH

I'll kill you.

NICO

You're in no condition. . .

KEITH

You've done nothing but ruin my life.

[KEITH goes to hit NICO.]

NICO

If you're going to aim, aim straight at me.

KEITH

You're a lousy fucking whore of a step-brother.

NICO

Go on.

KEITH

Goddamn son-of-a-bitch.

NICO

That's right.

KEITH

You should've never come into my life.

[KEITH hits NICO. NICO fights back. They wrestle on the sand. After a while, NICO slams KEITH.]

KEITH

I can't move.

NICO

Serves you right. Messing with my Chloe.

KEITH

She's a tart.

NICO

So are you.

KEITH

I can't feel a single bone in my body. You're all muscle.

NICO

I've been working out.

KEITH

Why do you hate me?

NICO

You're going to sulk now?

KEITH

I'm stronger than you. How could you beat me?

NICO

I'm not drunk.

KEITH

I didn't really have anything. A couple glasses of wine, some vodka. . .

NICO

You're going to kill yourself if you're not careful.

KEITH

That's what Susan says. She worries about me. I miss talking to her. We'd send messages to each other sometimes ten times a day. Beep-beep, beep-beep.

NICO

Radiating your brain.

KEITH

Susan says things like she knows the inside of me. It's spooky.

NICO

Invasive?

KEITH

No. But she says things and I don't know where they come from. Cause they're true, you know. They are absolutely true. It's as if we grew up together or something.

NICO

Maybe she has a gift.

KEITH

Like Chloe?

NICO

Yeah. Like Chloe's voice, and her infinite understanding.

[KEITH stands up slowly.]

KEITH

Goddamn sky is raging.

NICO

Susan says it's algae.

KEITH

Damn cold.

NICO

We should go inside.

KEITH

. . . I'm sorry.

NICO

What for?

KEITH

Chloe. I didn't know when I met her. I mean, you should have seen the state I was in.

NICO

. . . Susan doesn't love me. She just thinks she does because she's thinking of you all the time. You shouldn't lose her.

KEITH

Cause she's good value?

NICO

You always got an eye out. Like me. But you don't need to. She's as good as they come. She just feels too much, that's all. Gets herself sunk into the likes of me.

KEITH

You're all right.

NICO

I'm evil.

KEITH

Yeah. Hey. Remember when we used to sing? What was that song?

NICO

"Under Pressure." Bowie and Queen.

KEITH

We'd have a laugh, didn't we?

NICO

We had plenty.

[KEITH and NICO walk away. An all-consuming red-ness takes over the sky. SUSAN appears on the beach. She begins to take off her clothes.]

SUSAN

Vile, infected, poisonous, malignant, destructive, venomous, deadly, afflicted, affliction, afflict me Bring me harm, curse me down, wrap me in evil, I want a plague over me, a virus to get inside me I want every noxious fume to find its way into my pores, there is no other reason for living, there is no other meaning to love, I am its servant, its child, its beaten mistress, I surrender to the bloom of algae, Its vermillion cascade of miasmic woe, this is me, this is my heart, this is as naked as I get, You are everything to me, undeserved one, you haunt my dreams, possess me, keep me in shame, I compete with you in imaginary races, I devour you in sleep, I wake up famished at the mention of your Name, this is not normal, Keith, this is not sane, These are my thoughts true, unabashed, outside the screen, outside of wandering, past the common everyday we revel in. what do you say now, lover? What will you say now, tart? Now that you know me? I have gone toxic. No more purity.

[SUSAN has stripped down to underpants, and two pieces of black electric tape which cover her nipples. She is about to walk into the ocean when GENNA appears.]

GENNA

What are you doing? There's a storm out. You should be inside.

SUSAN

Get away from me.

GENNA

I don't want Dad to find me out here all by myself. Will you help me? Will you?

SUSAN

[turns to GENNA]

What?

GENNA

. . . You look funny.

[SUSAN starts to get dressed.]

Why'd you do that to yourself?

SUSAN

What?

GENNA

Tape. Looks weird.

SUSAN

I wanted to prove something.

GENNA

You're like those girls at the club, aren't you?

SUSAN

Which club?

GENNA

"Hell." It's all red inside. Like the sky is now. And these girls dance about in next to nothing. You're like them, aren't you?

SUSAN

I wish.

GENNA

I wish, too.

SUSAN

Do you?

GENNA

I want to be evil like them.

SUSAN

They're not evil. They're just girls. Like us.

GENNA

You think?

SUSAN

Yeah.

GENNA

Brave, though, aren't they? I've been trying to be brave all night, but. . .

[GENNA starts to cry.]

SUSAN

What is it? What's wrong, eh? What's happened to you?

GENNA

Nothing.

SUSAN

Is that why you're crying, then? Cause of nothing?

GENNA

Yes.

SUSAN

We're both fools.

GENNA

I ran away.

SUSAN

That's brave.

GENNA

My Dad's looking for me. I didn't know he cared so much about me.

SUSAN

Dads hide.

GENNA

They're stupid.

SUSAN

Sometimes.

GENNA

I should find him. He'll go mad with worry.

SUSAN

Do you know where he is?

GENNA

He must be at the hotel. Cause of the storm. He's got to be there, right?

SUSAN

You want me to go with you?

GENNA

Would you?

SUSAN

Yes.

GENNA

. . .Did you want to kill yourself?

SUSAN

Not tonight.

GENNA

Not ever. It's wrong.

SUSAN

Not even for love?

GENNA

Do you love him very much?

SUSAN

Yes.

GENNA

Did you tell him?

SUSAN

In different ways.

GENNA

Maybe you shouldn't say anything. Maybe then he'll figure it out.

SUSAN

You think?

GENNA

Or maybe he's just on holiday. My Dad says when men go on holiday they lose all sense of themselves.

SUSAN

Your Dad's a smart man.

GENNA

He's stupid. He left my Mom, and he was crazy about her. Still is. Is it really algae on the ocean?

SUSAN

That's what was predicted.

GENNA

It's pretty.

SUSAN & GENNA

In a weird kind of way.

GENNA

How'd you know I was going to-?

SUSAN

I didn't.

GENNA

. . . Transmission, eh? You caught my thought in your brain. . . . Do I look okay? I've been running around all night. I don't want Dad to think I've been. . .

SUSAN

You're lovely.

[Lights fade.]

Act 2, Scene 10

Scene ten

[Day. KEITH and PELLEAS are on the terrace.]

PELLEAS

Genna was scared last night. Susan was very kind.

KEITH

She is that.

PELLEAS

You don't like kindness?

KEITH

I don't like feeling grateful all the time.

PELLEAS

Why would you have to be grateful?

KEITH

Somebody does something out of goodness, out of their heart, you have to thank them, and it doesn't stop, because when a person's good, goodness keeps pouring out of them.

PELLEAS

I thought Nico was the weak one. You're downright fragile.

KEITH

I'm not.

PELLEAS

You come all the way out here to this blue peninsula on holiday and you misinterpret everything, you seek everything that's wrong in everyone else, but yourself. You blame Susan

KEITH

She screwed Nico, didn't she?

PELLEAS

And you're a saint? "Wisdom is understanding that weakness equals strength."

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KEITH

What's that?

PELLEAS

Your beloved Tzu.

KEITH

He didn't say that.

PELLEAS

Have you read him?

KEITH

. . . Where are you going?

PELLEAS

Roll on the beach, bit of a swim, a paperback thriller. . . I live here. Holiday is never over for me.

[PELLEAS exits.]

KEITH

He doesn't know what he's talking about. I'm not weak. I feel like my heart is being tested all the time. How much can it take? How open can it be?

[SUSAN appears, unseen by KEITH.]

Ecoutez. Regardez. Regardez moi. Je suis desole. Je suis perdu.

SUSAN

I fell in love with your words before I fell in love with your voice. It was a surprise to me. I had become used to your silent tongue. I didn't know you had so many voices inside of you. At first I didn't know how to read your voice. I kept listening to hear if I could identify the one I had grown to love. And then I heard it: *Ecoutez. Regardez. Regardez moi.*

KEITH

I was just thinking out loud.

SUSAN

I have premonitions of a life. I look at someone and somehow I know who they are instantly, Past their public self, straight to the private. It's not an easy thing knowing so much so quickly, because you catch someone's lies so much faster. And you have to be patient through the lies because you know that once they're over, the person you know to be true will surface again. I have never felt you had to tell me anything, because I could read you: LUSH, NAKED, HEARTLESS, TENDER, HURTFUL, STUPID, WANT, WANT, WNT

KEITH

What are you on about?

SUSAN

. . . The sea.

KEITH

Liar.

SUSAN

Yes.

KEITH

. . . It's been a rotten holiday. For both of us.

SUSAN

Has it?

KEITH

Everything's gone wrong. And now we have to take the train and head back to the city. . . . What's that?

SUSAN

What?

KEITH

In your hand.

SUSAN

Seashell. I found it near the shrine. It's for you.

KEITH

It's so small.

SUSAN

Fragile.

[Pause.]

SUSAN

Summer should never end.

KEITH

I love not having to do anything about anything.

SUSAN

Not a care.

KEITH

Except for you.

[Lights fade.]

(END OF PLAY.)